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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the overall conceptual and pedagogical goals of a program ('Exploring Childhood') designed to help adolescents gain competence in working with children and an understanding of the forces that shape children's development. The paper is intended as an explanation of the assumptions and questions that guided the development of the course materials. The course, as outlined, attempts to help students understand what a child is like, how human interaction can shape the development of a child, and how the context in which growth occurs can affect development. A series of activities help the student to develop flexible ways of thinking about children. Three 'modules' are identified in this curriculum sequence, and appropriate readings are suggested for each level of the program. The study of child development is combined with work with young children on a regular basis. Self-evaluation materials are also part of the curriculum program, and are designed to help students identify ways in which they would like to gain competence and to give them guidelines for evaluating the results of a situation and measuring their own progress. (CS)

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OVERVILW OF EXPLORING CHILDHOOD

Marilyn Clayton

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This reading by Marilyn Clayton, Project Director for EXPLORING CHILDHOOD, describes the over-all conceptual and pedagogical designs of the course. By presenting the assumptions and questions that guided the development of the course materials, this paper aims to help teachers better understand the goals for EXPLORING CHILDHOOD.

There is a growing body of evidence that the process of making human beings human is breaking down in American society. The signs of this breakdown are seen in the growing rates of alienation, apathy, rebellion, delinquency, and violence we have observed in this nation in recent decades.... The causes of the breakdown are of course manifold, but they all operate in one direction--namely to decrease the active concern of one generation for the next.

Urie Bronfenbrenner
Professor
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Cornell University

I have long believed that the development of a child does not begin the day he is born--or at age three--but much earlier, during the formative years of his parents.

Edward Zigler
Professor and Director
Child Development Program
Department of Psychology
Yale University

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EXPLORING CHILDHOOD is a program in which the study of child development is combined with work with young children on a regular basis. It gives students opportunities to develop competence in working with children, and a framework for understanding the forces that shape the development of a child.

Three government agencies have joined in the funding of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD, each one viewing the program in a special way. When the National Institute of Mental Health considered the program in 1970, their concern was the alienation many teenagers feel from both family and society. They saw a program of work with children offering teenagers a role in which they are needed by others, and an experience that would both deepen their sense of personal identity and increase their compassion for, and understanding of their families. The Office of Child Development became involved as the major funder in 1971. They viewed the students as being responsible for the next generation of children, and saw EXPLORING CHILDHOOD as a way for students to prepare for parenthood, for careers involving children, or, simply, for citizenship, with the responsibility of making daily decisions that affect children. In 1972 the Office of Education added their support, seeing the program as having application beyond the initial target population of junior and senior high school students, by providing career incentive for potential drop-outs as well as career training for unemployed adults interested in working with children. We feel that all these goals are compatible with the pedagogy and scope of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD.

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The Pedagogical Approach of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD

The main source of energy for students in EXPLORING CHILDHOOD is their field work with children. In developing a curriculum around field work, we have been guided by the following questions:

> What kinds of help can we provide to make the field work rewarding?
>
> How can we draw on the feelings, ideas, questions, memories, plans, and insights generated by that experience to bring students more in touch with their own identities and to foster in them an understanding of the conditions needed for growth in others?
>
> What ideas and issues from the social sciences will allow students to understand and explore the world of children?

In developing a pedagogy for EXPLORING CHILDHOOD, a central concern has been the need to allow the program to be adaptable to a vast range of conditions. For example, secondary schools will be teaching the program under many disciplines, including home economics, family living, social studies, and health; there will be many types of fieldsites, including lab school within the school, preschools, Head Start centers, day-care centers, and family day-care sites; students themselves will vary both in academic preparation and in real-life preparation for the course; and, most importantly, the preschool children will come from homes that represent tremendous diversity both in goals for children and in child-rearing practices.

It became clear that it would not be feasible to suggest specific responses to certain kinds of issues. How to treat an aggressive act, what to do when a child uses a swear word, what kinds of specific, cognitive-skill training a child should receive--issues such as these are difficult to resolve within a given child-care setting; to try to develop specific suggestions that would meet the needs and values of the full range

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of sites using the program was impossible. Our approach to specific child-care techniques, therefore, has been to "apprentice" the student to the responsible adult at the fieldsite, who, knowing the perspective of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD, is able to communicate and respond to the values of parents and the community.

So that students can become valued members of the child-care staff, what we give them, instead of specific techniques, is a series of interesting activities to do with children and ways to think about situations involving children that can become a basis for informed action. Throughout the course materials, students' thinking is guided by these sets of questions:

> How does a child experience the world? At his or her age, what are the child's beliefs, abilities, interests, fears, areas of growth?
>
> What is transmitted in the commonplace social interactions in a child's world? What do this child's family, pre-school, community, want for him or her? How does a child influence the people around him or her?
>
> How does a society affect the conditions in which a family rears a child?
>
> What are my values for a child? What are my beliefs about what causes a child to grow and change? How do my actions relate to my values and beliefs?
>
> How does what I am learning apply to my work with children?
>
> What am I learning about myself?

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD attempts to help students understand what a child is like, how human interaction can shape the development of a child, and how the context in which growth occurs can affect development. These insights and perspectives, we believe, can help students become increasingly flexible and able to respond to children in ways that make sense for each individual within a given situation.

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The Conceptual Framework of the Program

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD is concerned with the development of a sense of self and a sense of others, both in young adults and in the children with whom they work. This program hopes to help students gain competence in working with children.

Our approach has been shaped by a desire to introduce concepts in ways that respect the students' personal experience with children, both previous to and during EXPLORING CHILDHOOD. Rather than define concepts early on and teach lists of facts, we have introduced concepts as suggested guidelines for organizing observation. We ask students to recollect experiences, collect observations, and decide for themselves if a suggested concept makes sense in terms of what they have seen. Looking at concepts from the perspective of concrete experience not only helps students legitimize the way they will learn about children during the rest of their lives, but also offers new intellectual opportunities for students who have had little previous academic success. Students who have had extensive child-care experience have much to offer others in the class.

Concepts have been selected both for their helpfulness in field work and for their relevance to development throughout the life cycle. Examples of concepts we have found generative are "egocentrism," for understanding the growth and change in a person's view of the world; and "values," for understanding what is transmitted in human interactions.

The Sequence of the Curriculum

Suggestions for the general sequence of the curriculum come from what we have found to be the cycle of needs and interests of students working with young children.

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Module I, Working with Children: A student's major concerns at the beginning of the year, before starting to work with children, are:

What will the field work be like?

What kind of role will I have?

Will the children like me?

Will I be able to cope?

Consequently, this first group of materials attempts to help students develop a sense of competence before starting their field work, and to build the class into a support group in which failures as well as successes can be discussed. Commonplace situations with children and their teachers, which are presented as case studies through film, audio-tape, storyboard, and photo essay, allow students to share ideas about children's behavior and about what to do in problem situations. Observation is focused on the fieldsites--their special nature as places for children, the purposes of fieldsite materials, the activities and environments fieldsites provide, and the ways teachers interact with children. Guidelines for observing children and for keeping a journal about experiences begin a theme that is developed throughout the year: ways of learning about children.

A book of activities for children, *Doing Things*, gives students concrete things to plan and do with children. A film made at a variety of fieldsites shows them the numerous kinds of roles they can take with children.

Although much of *Working with Children* is used during the first month, as preparation for field work, the materials are appropriate for use throughout the year. For example, "Teacher, Lester Bit Me," an animated film about the plight of a preschool teacher on a day when everything seems to go wrong, is good material for one of those times during the year when students

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need encouragement about field work or a chance to view their work with humor. With or without reference to these fieldsite materials, discussion of field experiences should be an ongoing part of classwork, both when students have problems, successes, or questions they want to share and when their experience supports, contradicts, or gains new meaning from conceptual materials.

The pedagogical challenge of *Working with Children* is this: How to foster an "open-ended" approach to looking at explanations of behavior and ways of interacting with children, yet help students reach the "closure" that is satisfying for learning and absolutely necessary for action. Using case studies, a teacher can help students arrive at some conclusions about what they would do, based on their view of a situation. The purpose is not to reach group consensus, which rarely happens in child-care discussion because of legitimate differences in values and views about the nature of development, but to help each student develop confidence in his or her own ability to examine a situation and follow his or her best judgment. As the year proceeds, students will deepen skills through practice in observing situations and evaluating outcomes.

Module II, Seeing Development: Once students have started field work, the concrete experience with children begins. Students become interested in learning what a child is like, and, specifically, about the ways in which children are different from older people. A general booklet, *Looking at Development*, sets the context for exploring human development by considering the capacities of an infant; it introduces the question, "What do you believe brings about growth and change in a child?" and describes the ways several theorists have approached the study of development. Generalized data about development, collected from a number of sources in the field, is included,

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along with suggestions of other ways to learn about children--specifically, collecting data about growth and change in a child and about the development of diversity among children. *Looking at Development* is designed to be a reference point throughout the unit, and to help students summarize their learnings at the end.

Five other booklets delve into particular areas of a child's development: *Children's Art* presents one way of looking at the growth of skill, and introduces the concept of stages of development. In *How the World Works*, a child's beliefs about cause and effect, change, time, similarities and differences, and what things are alive or not alive are explored. *A Child's Eye View* considers the concept of egocentrism, a child's growing awareness of the minds, feelings, perspectives and needs of others, and the idea of moral development in children. The motivations and developmental factors in children's behavior that are generally considered problems are discussed in *Tears and Troubles*. *Child's Play*, the fifth book, rounds out the students' perspective on development by looking at the many opportunities for growth play affords a child.

Through these booklets, students can enter the world of a child, look at patterns of growth and change at different ages, consider the ways individual differences develop, and, finally, think about how they can support development in ways that are meaningful for each particular child in their care.

The pedagogical problem for this module is to provide a framework for learning and concepts about development--such as "egocentrism" and the notion of "stages." We do not want to preempt a student's way of seeing development or contradict the message that a student's data perceptions are important guides for learning. Our approach has been both to suggest learning theories or concepts as guidelines for observations and to present ideas of theorists

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in an explicit way. We emphasize that theories are speculations of flesh-and-blood people by showing what triggered a theorist's interest in children and what behavior was observed that led to the development of a theory. The teacher's responsibility is to connect theory to the data of the student's own observations and to connect both of these with practice. The teacher must continually refer students to their own experiences with children; to help them question and explore the validity of concepts and theories. He or she must show clearly how a concept relates to caring for a child, be aware of how students connect a concept to concrete behavior, and allow students to bring their own experience to bear in either supporting or questioning a concept. Also, teachers must help their students see that they too have theories about development that can be tested by observation, used in caring for children, and shared with their classmates as valuable resources for learning.

Module III, Family and Society: Once students have deepened their sense of how a child sees the world, the course shifts from the ways in which the child's mind and body develop to the social forces that influence a child's life. Interactions in the family, with the world "beyond the front door," and with the environment, resources, beliefs, and values of the society at large become the central focus of attention.

The study of family is based on a series of documentary films showing interactions in a variety of families. This material was designed with two major goals in mind: (1) to heighten students' perceptions of what is transmitted to children in daily commonplace interactions; and (2) to let students experience the childrearing styles of families other than their own in order to gain insight into the attitudes, traditions, and values of others. The notion of clarifying values and beliefs about children and child-rearing and

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measuring these beliefs and values against one's actions--a notion which is touched on earlier in the course--becomes central here. It provides a foundation for understanding that all families have implicit values for children and implicit beliefs about childrearing. It enables students to grasp the crucial idea that all family interactions transmit messages to children, implicitly or explicitly, that may or may not be consistent with family values.

Beyond the Front Door, the middle section in the module, follows children as they leave their home--for preschool, to join in the daily tasks of a parent, or to play in the yard or the street. Students are asked to explore how a child interacts in this expanded world: How many people are friends? How many are strangers? What contact does a child have with his or her parents' work? What values and childrearing practices does the child encounter among people outside the family?

Matching Messages considers the interrelationship between the messages received in and beyond the home. For students it poses the challenge of taking into consideration the values and practices of the child's family, the values and practices of the preschool, and also the student's own values and sense of what to do when caring for a child.

Up to this point the course deals with things students see and affect every day, whether it be some activity that shows a child's development or the interactions between two people. Now the course turns to social organization, and considers invisible underlying structures and circumstances over which individuals have little immediate control. While this exploration should surely deepen students' understanding of the children in their care, we see the major motivational force of this material to be the student's concern about the kind of society he or she envisions for the next generation of children, and thoughts about what he or she might do personally about it.

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The central issue--how a society affects the conditions in which a family rears a child--is specified in two sets of questions, which are used to explore other societies as well as our own:

> What does a family need to protect and nourish its children? Who should provide what a family needs?
>
> What messages does a society transmit to children through its media, agencies, and institutions?

Students will examine other societies through documentary film and written and taped autobiographical accounts. Our own society will be examined through independent research projects. Exposure to childrearing practices of foreign societies allows students to become familiar with the range of ways in which human societies have provided care and protection for their young. The Israeli kibbutz is one society chosen for study, because kibbutz members have clearly articulated their values and, therefore, we can examine them. Also, many of the issues that influenced kibbutzniks initially in planning child care are issues of current concern to our society--provision of equal roles for women, pros and cons of group care for children, cooperativeness as a desirable trait. The other reason kibbutzim provide an excellent study is that many are three generations old and show more than the effects of social innovation per se. Students can debate the values and practices of the kibbutz and use this debate as a vantage point from which to take a fresh look at the values and practices of the society they know.

Research and Action, another part of this final section of the course, suggests individual study projects for students on aspects of the way their own society provides for children. Materials describe ways of collecting data on such topics as children's literature, law and children, public media and children, and nutrition. In addition to the research skills, survey skills, and new observation skills that these projects develop, students have the opportunity to meet people in a variety of roles that may suggest future career

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possibilities for them.

The pedagogical challenge of *Family and Society* is to help students develop a more compassionate understanding of their own families, while helping them to understand and respect the values, traditions, and practices of others. When students begin the course, they tend to limit their perceptions in one of two directions. Either they defend their own family experiences so strongly that they have trouble seeing other ways of expressing love and care; or, in appreciating the ways of others, they find the values and practices of their own families lacking. Teachers have two resources to draw upon in making the exploration of family and society a strong and positive contribution to students' understanding of self and others. One is the observation that raising a child to find a meaningful place in the world and to care for himself or herself and others is a responsibility shared by parents everywhere. The ways in which different parents meet this task can begin to be understood by considering the enormous complexity of the task, the traditions of a family, and the conditions society provides for them. The second resource is the set of feelings that working with children evokes in students--tenderness, anger, frustration, love, inadequacy, pride, overwhelming responsibility, and desire to protect. Young adults frequently gain a new and deeply sympathetic view of their family when their first child is born and they begin experiencing all the emotions that come with that responsibility. Working with children evokes these emotions in a small beginning way, and a sensitive teacher can help students build an understanding of families that is based upon these incipient feelings.

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Self-evaluation

Above we have described the general sequence and flow of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD over the course of a year. Important throughout the year is the development of one's own sense of identity, which involves identifying and understanding one's own values and beliefs about children, developing competence in working with children, and knowing how to evaluate one's own growth. Self-evaluation materials are part of the curriculum; they have been designed to help students identify ways in which they would like to gain competence, and to give them guidelines for evaluating the results of a situation and measuring their own progress.

Underlying Values of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD

In the process of developing EXPLORING CHILDHOOD we have often been asked--and have often asked ourselves--what values are implicit in the program. Altogether, we find that four major values have influenced the direction of EXPLORING CHILDHOOD:

1. *To view the present, whether adolescence or childhood, as an important time of being as well as becoming.* Our priority in this respect is not to prepare students to be parents or professionals, or to prepare children to be adults, but to help both to have rewarding experiences each day they are together.

2. *To demonstrate that insight can be learned and can be an important influence on behavior.* Students are helped to see how others experience the world, what messages are transmitted in human interactions, what influence social organization exerts; and to understand their own beliefs and values.

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3. *To help students and children develop confidence in their own identities.* For children, receiving appreciation from students of their particular abilities, personalities, and family backgrounds helps develop confidence. For students, being supported by teachers in their new role as caregivers increases self-esteem. At the same time, learning to appreciate the values and traditions of their own families nourishes their sense of worth.

4. *To legitimize the view that anyone responsible for the care of a child has worthwhile experiences to share with others.* Parents, preschool teachers, people involved in health, artistic, legal, educational or welfare professions, and students themselves have been involved in creating the EXPLORING CHILDHOOD curriculum; all should be considered resource people for a classroom.

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD is a program that has the potential of breaking down barriers between age groups and between institutions and bringing people together in a common venture. A resourceful teacher can make EXPLORING CHILDHOOD a rich experience for many members of a community.